

home after a hard day's outing, but much pleased with the various objects of natural history noticed.

The last week was spent mostly near Mr. Morton's house, in the "lignum," and in this scrub was found several nests and eggs of Red-capped Robin, Chestnut-eared Finch, White-faced Xerophila, Superb Warbler, &c. Several White-winged Superb Warblers were noticed, but I was unable to find any nests.

Benjeroop is rather a bad place for snakes, one being killed by Mrs. Morton, close to the house, while I was there. When Mr. Morton and I were out we often saw several, they being nearly always the Copper-headed species.

There are a great many blackfellows' ovens about Benjeroop ; and I was informed by Mr. Morton that skeletons of aboriginals are often found when one digs for them.

A phenomenon that is very striking to a person who has never seen one before is the mirage, and on several occasions, when driving with Mr. Morton we noticed them, and, thinking we were coming to a lake, I was much surprised to see the mirage suddenly disappear.

In conclusion, I have to thank Mr. A. J. Campbell for my introduction to Mr. Morton ; and I take this opportunity of thanking the latter gentleman and his wife for their kindness and attention to me during my stay at Benjeroop ; and also Baron von Mueller for his kindness in naming the plants, and otherwise assisting me. I returned to Melbourne by the same route as that by which I came, and reached home after an absence of three weeks.

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## COLLECTING NEAR HOME.

BY E. M. CORNWALL.

(*Read before the Field Naturalists' Club of Victoria, 8th July, 1889.*)

OF the many difficulties which a young naturalist may have to contend with, more especially in or near a large city, the scarcity of collecting grounds is perhaps the most prominent. And yet in many cases this dearth of localities in which to search is more a matter of imagination than of fact, for it is simply wonderful what marvels can be brought to light by an enthusiast in a spot which a casual observer would pronounce to be utterly barren.

We very often hear members of this club complaining of the lack of good collecting grounds near home, and a short time ago a paper in which the following passage occurs was read before the club :—"Our collecting grounds are now restricted to the sadly diminishing moors of Cheltenham and Brighton, and to a narrow strip on the banks of the Yarra." Now, were this so we might well feel disheartened, but I am thankful to be able to

assert that such is not by any means the case; indeed I will venture to say that there is not another city in the world with the same population that can offer greater attractions to the naturalist within its suburban radius.

A few miles by rail in any direction around Melbourne will take us into fairly open country, where every branch of natural history may be studied to a greater or less extent. What one finds may not be always new, but the true naturalist does not seek ever for the new, for by so doing he would pass much that would be of infinite interest and of inestimable value. He sees beauty in all of Nature's works, and through it all recognizes the bountiful hand of the Great Creator. 'Tis only so that we may rise to higher grade than that of the mere collector of specimens.

As my own interest is more particularly centred in Ornithology, this short paper will naturally touch principally upon that subject, but at the same time I feel confident that it will apply to a very great extent to all branches of natural history.

As a general rule our native birds do not take at all kindly to civilization in its more advanced forms. Where houses thickly cluster we hear no more the peaceful warblings of the wren or the gay carolling of the magpie; in their place the lively chirruping of the sparrow and the loud whistle of the Indian minah, offer us slight, but, alas! very slight, compensation. But still there are many places within easy reach where numbers of our feathered friends are yet to be found.

Although the swamps which used to lie on each side of the Yarra, between the city and the sea, with their teeming myriads of wild fowl, from the gluttonous Pelican to the tiny Grebe, are now but a memory of the past, the lower Yarra, with its few remaining swamps and sedges, affords some attraction to the ornithologist.

The Pacific Gull may still be seen flying up and down the stream, and the pretty Silver Gull keeps him company in goodly numbers. The cormorants, who in days of yore perched, like sentinels, on stump and overhanging bough, now take possession of the many piles and beacons which mark the channel's course. A solitary Musk Duck is occasionally seen in the reaches of the river, but he does not feel "at home," and scuttles away affrighted from the many passing steamers; his days here are numbered, and soon he will be thought of as are the swans, and geese, and ducks of days gone by.

Although the larger hawks are not now to be found here, the pretty Nankeen Kestrel can often be noticed skimming on graceful wing over the flats, or flying high in air, screaming as it were in anger at some steamboat's whistle or other uncongenial sound.

The Little Grass Bird frequents those grassy flats which are

awash at high water, building its nest, in company with the *Ephthianura*, just out of reach of the encroaching tide.

During the later months of the year the plaintive note of the Reed Warbler is heard amongst the rushes and reeds which fringe the river's bank in places; his nest is tolerably secure here from marauding boys, and he is likely to be one of the last to be driven from his old haunts.

On the low sandy rises between Sandridge and the river, where the low scrub and tussocky grass is not all cleared away, the Rufous-headed Grass Warbler builds its fairy-like home, and the Pectoral Rail runs amongst the grasses, though in sadly diminished numbers.

The immense tract of marshy land known as the West Melbourne Swamp has proved an inexhaustible harvest field for the microscopist, and will continue so for many years to come. Those stagnant pools and slimy water weeds are swarming with objects of intense interest to the searcher after minute forms—Diatoms, Desmids, and scores of other objects, all too numerous to mention here, many of them so tiny that the naked eye cannot see them, and yet each has its allotted place in the mighty universe. Unsavoury as it undoubtedly is, much can be learned from a walk along the banks of the Lower Yarra.

The dense scrub along the coast between Mordialloc and Frankston, and even back to Brighton, affords favourite coverts for many of our birds, more especially the smaller species. When the *Banksias* are in bloom it would be hard to find a better collecting ground for many varieties of Honeyeaters. The peculiar discordant note of the Wattled Honeyeater rings out its warning cry from every tree-top, and its smaller congener, the Brush Wattle Bird, is also fairly plentiful.

This strip of coast country may be said to be the chosen habitat of the New Holland Honeyeater. These birds feed in scores amongst the flowers of the *Banksia*; or, when such flowers are not obtainable, may be seen preying upon insects, which they nimbly catch whilst on the wing.

In the darkest patches of scrub, the Mountain Thrush has her nest, returning year after year to the old home, rebuilding and renovating it to render it fit for habitation. This is a very shy bird, and being extremely silent in its habits, is not by any means the easiest specimen to secure. When pushing through the dense thicket the hunter makes his presence known long before he comes upon the nest, and then the bird is far away. Viewed from below, the nest appears to be merely an accumulation of rubbish, overgrown with moss and lichens; but a closer inspection reveals a compact, cup-shaped nest, warmly lined with fine grass, in which repose two or three delicate green eggs, blotched with dull pink.

The Bronzewing Pigeon was once very plentiful here, but pot-hunters are rather too much for him, and he is scarce now. Occasionally a whirr of wings tells us that these beautiful birds are not quite exterminated, and now and then one of their nests may be found, a primitive platform of sticks, through which the two white eggs are plainly visible from below. The marvel is how the eggs remain in their fragile resting-place when the bird scuttles off in her fright.

Here, too, the *Sericornis* builds its warm, dome-shaped, feather-lined nest, its favourite situation close to the ground, at the foot of a tree. The *Sericornis* is a very sensitive little bird. Simply touch the entrance of the nest with a finger and the home is deserted, though the young may be half grown.

The sweet, soft warble of the White-shafted Fantail is always to be heard, and in due season one may take its nest—a marvel of beauty, wondrously woven of fine grasses and cobwebs, and firmly fixed to a thin, horizontal branch.

The Brown Hawk often hunts about these scrubby patches and over the flats across the railway line, where quail and snipe are to be found in limited numbers. In the old days the Carrum Carrum Swamp was a famous hunting ground. The quail and snipe loved its grassy flats, and the swans and ducks nested in thousands amongst the reeds and rushes surrounding its many pools. Even now a pair of swans may sometimes be found rearing their brood amongst the sedges of their old home, as if loth to be driven away before the march of civilization.

The Boobook Owl sleeps the day away in the heart of the densest bush. Hollow trees are scarce now, so he finds a thick shelter of leaves in which to pass his hours of idleness.

Before leaving this district I must not omit to mention the fossil beds of Cheltenham, which are of considerable extent and remarkable interest, as many a member of our club can testify. Relics of the past are always to be obtained there, whilst valuable finds are occasionally brought to light.

Leaving the coast, and striking off in a north-easterly direction, much open country is found. The many paddocks and bits of waste land interspersed amongst the farms and market gardens offer admirable inducements to collectors. More especially does this refer to botanists. A close inspection of this apparently barren-looking country reveals a variety of plants which is simply marvellous. Orchids, including many rare and beautiful species, are remarkably plentiful, and it is not at all outside the bounds of possibility that some entirely new species may be discovered by close and diligent searching.

Although many of the paddocks where such good work could be done some few years ago are now laid out in streets and thriving villages and paper towns, the hunter has but to go a little

further to find spots equal to them in every respect. A walk across country from Cheltenham or Mentone to Oakleigh will reveal many localities that collectors rarely visit, and where objects of great interest are to be obtained.

Entomologists could hardly wish for a better field, more especially for the smaller forms, which abound in countless multitudes. Every step taken through these heathy grounds rouses scores from their hiding places, and each sweep of the net adds something to the day's takings.

Many varieties of birds can be taken around Oakleigh. The peculiarly plaintive note of the White-eared Honeyeater is heard here more frequently than in any other spot near Melbourne, and its graceful cup-shaped nest, containing two or three prettily-spotted flesh-coloured eggs, may be found in the heart of some low bush or stunted sapling.

The Spotted-sided Finch, a bird not by any means common near the metropolis, builds every year in this neighbourhood. Its favourite haunt is some four miles from the railway station, in a south-easterly direction, where it builds in the young gums a rough-looking dome-shaped nest of coarse grass.

The Field Calamanthus is another frequenter of these moors, and the diligent searcher will sometimes be rewarded by finding its beautiful feather-lined nest, snugly hidden away under the thick low-growing branches of a stunted bush.

A still greater prize would be the nest and eggs of the tiny Emu Wren. Last year I observed several, one being a half-fledged male, within a hundred yards of the railway line; so it is very evident they breed in the neighbourhood.

Many more birds could be named as obtainable here, either amongst the sedges which surround the numerous swamps and small lagoons, the ti-tree scrub by the creek, or amongst the branches of the gums.

A better general collecting ground than this district offers could hardly be found, and I would urge all collectors to hunt it, and to hunt it well, and will guarantee that their efforts will meet with ample reward.

Away in a north-easterly direction from Oakleigh are many excellent localities well within walking distance of the station. Along the Ferntree Gully and Waverley roads are numberless well-timbered paddocks and some thickly scrub-lined creeks, where the naturalist may wander all the day, and many days, always finding something to claim his attention or to evoke his admiration.

A walk along the high road to the crossing of the Dandenong Creek brings one into almost new ground, approaching the primeval in secluded spots, carpeted with wild flowers in spring-

time, resounding with bird-songs, and alive with insect life during the riper summer months.

But it is not necessary to go so far as the Dandenong Creek to find good hunting grounds. The whole of the country to the eastward of Burwood and Glen Iris is, comparatively speaking, sparsely settled. Along the Damper Creek are many secluded nooks, thickly timbered with the varieties of trees and shrubs which love those damp places. Between there and the foot-hills of the Dandenong Ranges, a distance of only seven or eight miles, are creeks and gullies innumerable, affording endless fields of work in all branches to students of "the manuscripts of God."

A specially favourite haunt of mine is a paddock, or rather several paddocks, on the Ferntree Gully road, some four miles from Oakleigh. There I have done much work, and learned many lessons; and would strongly advise others to go that way.

Then as to that narrow strip along the bank of the Yarra. Its interest is wide, whatever its breadth may be. Past Kew, away through Heidelberg and Eltham onwards, are miles upon miles of country where the naturalist may roam amongst, and revel in, those wonders for the study of which this club was formed.

I would also point out to members who do not know the country well that the new railway line about being opened through Hastings to Crib Point passes through many miles of heavily timbered forest land, which, for the whole distance, is teeming with objects of interest. Nor is this all; but time forbids their mention.

In conclusion, I trust that I have proved that we are yet well off for spots wherein to gather Nature's harvest; and though it may be presumptuous for a young member to express such an opinion, I may remark that it has sometimes struck me that our nearer collecting grounds are deemed exhausted before they really are, and that our searchers have been somewhat hasty. No hour's ramble anywhere can tell that place's story thoroughly, nor yet reveal, to even those who best know where to look, all Nature's secrets it may hold. I also have had doubts as to whether the "largest bag" will necessarily produce the best results and throw most light on what we fain would know—the true life-history of bird and beast, of insect, plant, and sod; and sometimes fancy that knowledge may be gathered up where specimens are not procurable—more valuable far.

In one of his charming essays John Burroughs has well said, "We cannot read Nature's book at the run;" and we, who desire to study the Victorian edition thereof, will not do ill to bear these words in mind. Then, the tale of species and variety complete, the oft-reaped fields near home will bear an aftermath, and interesting chapters will be penned on all the wondrous detail which makes up their life.